

Arnion v. Therion
A Palm Sunday Reflection
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Niantic Community Church
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Scripture: Isaiah 53:1-7; Revelation 5:1-14

What does a quirky Quantum field known as the Zero-Point Field, have to do with Palm Sunday, meditating yogis, the Book of Revelation, and the prophet Isaiah?

If your answer is not just “I don’t know,” but “I don’t know why I would even care about knowing,” then you may be a direct recipient this morning of that part of our weekly blessing that goes, “May God push you into places you may not necessarily go yourself.” I’m betting that, given a little nudge, you’ll be glad you came along for the ride. Even if it is a Palm Sunday donkey ride ...

The Zero-Point Field

First stop on our ride is the Zero-Point Field.

The Zero-Point Field, also known as the Quantum Vacuum, is a concept in quantum physics that describes the lowest possible energy state in any system. According to quantum theory, the Zero-Point Field contains some mysterious form of energy that continues to be present even after all known forms of energy are removed.

For instance, if we had a glass jar and created a vacuum inside such that absolutely no particle except a single electron from a single atom were in this jar, and we attached this electron to the world’s smallest spring in such a way that we could watch the spring bounce up and down whenever the electron tries to move around, and we were to then to drive the temperature inside this vacuum jar down to Absolute Zero (- 459.67 degrees Fahrenheit) ... we would expect that tiny spring to gradually stop bouncing and become perfectly still. At least it would become still after we turned the lights out so that no light could enter the jar to energize the electron.

However, quantum physicists tell us that even with all known forms of energy removed, the electron would keep animating the spring in our jar. Somehow, the electron is responding to a form of energy that is present even when no energy is supposed to be there!

Scientists account for this energy that’s not “supposed to” be there simply by factoring it out in their equations. They know that “zero energy” is not, in fact, zero. But what else can they do? Without a way to measure it, or account for it, they simply make calculations as if it weren’t there. They call the energy that’s not “supposed to” be there the Zero-Point Field.

The Zero-Point Field is thought to be present throughout the entire Universe, even in the vast emptiness of outer space, since we know the field to be present even in a vacuum at Absolute Zero temperature. Like the Oscar award-winning movie, the Zero-Point Field connects “everything, everywhere, all at once.”

Because the Zero-Point Field is made of energy that is present everywhere, some scientists believe it is an infinite source of energy that we might one day figure out how to tap into. Big money has been invested in studying the Zero-Point field for this very reason. Even the Pentagon has taken an interest. Imagine how our world would change if we could tap into an infinite energy source that is everywhere present!

Meditating Monks and Yogis

Actually, according to mystics and spiritual leaders from many of the world’s great religions, we already have tapped into this infinite energy source – and learned how to do it thousands of years ago. Some believe that, as a non-physical form of energy, the Zero-Point field is actually the energy of consciousness. Infinite consciousness that connects “everything, everywhere, all at once.”

While the idea is still highly speculative and has not been remotely scientifically proven, if the Zero-Point Field is where both infinite energy and consciousness reside, it may be the field that mystics and meditators connect to that has been called “Christ Consciousness” or “Cosmic Consciousness” by Christians and others, “Wu Wei” by Taoists, “Fana” by Sufis, or “Samadhi” by Hindus and Buddhists.

What makes the Zero-Point Field particularly suggestive in terms of being a field of infinite Consciousness is that, thousands of years before the Zero-Point Field was even a glimmer in some quantum physicist’s eye, mystics and spiritual leaders of a great number of faiths found that they could tap into a form of infinite power or consciousness through various techniques that all have one thing in common: they lower all power systems in the body that are associated with physical power.

The yogis of India, and the monks of Tibet, have long sought through meditation to lower the energy inside their brains and bodies to their lowest possible point. For centuries they have insisted that the more you lower your mind/body energy, the more powerful are the insights and awareness that are generated from seemingly nowhere. Some even claim that Reality itself becomes more malleable in such an energetically-lowered-yet-spiritually-heightened state.

Last week I mentioned that those who report having the highest satisfaction in meditation are those who meditate for at least 15 minutes a day, and that the longer one meditates, the higher the reported satisfaction tends to become. This may be because it takes time for our brainwaves to settle down into a more restful, less energized state.

Curiously, when the brains of highly experienced meditators across the world’s faith traditions have been hooked up to an Electroencephalogram (EEG) that records brain activity, they find that one kind of brain wave is present in far greater amounts than in the brains of novice

meditators and non-meditators. That is, gamma waves. One study found that highly experienced meditators have on average 30 times the percentage of gamma waves present in their brains during meditation than novices, and that novices have 3 times more gamma waves than non-meditators. Significantly, gamma waves are associated with heightened cognitive processing, sensory awareness, and heightened awareness and consciousness.

What is also significant is that, if you look at the lifestyles of most of these highly experienced meditators-monks and yogis, the way they conduct their everyday lives – and advocate for it being conducted – is quite similar. They tend to all advocate that one services to humanity rather than seeking to be served by humanity. They tend to seek the lowest places on the human totem pole rather than the highest. These people tend to tread lightly upon the earth, existing in harmony with nature more than trying to control it.

When I visited Gandhi's ashram last January, for instance, I found that the head of the entire ashram not only spends much of his time meditating, but spends his outward life humbly teaching orphaned school girls and hanging out with the poorest people in Ahmedabad. Every Friday, he changes up his routine by cleaning public toilets.

In other words, there is a coherence between his outer and inner life. Both his outer and inner life suggest to me that spiritual power runs in the exact opposite direction of worldly power. You might call spiritual power "outer and inner meekness."

We who live in a nation that resides at the apex of worldly power tend to think of meekness as weakness. Yet, it appears that the opposite is the case. Outer and inner meekness connects a person to the greatest form of super-consciousness. Some believe it connects them to the Zero-Point Field. Some believe it connects them to God. And some think that all these may one and the same thing!

If spiritual power truly runs in the exact opposite direction as worldly power, then no small number of Jesus' actions and teachings take on a meaning and significance that is quite striking.

Jesus and the Zero-Point Field

First, as we observed last week, the Gospels report Jesus spending extraordinary amounts of time in prayerful meditation – even entire nights. So, Jesus himself was devoted to lowering the activity in his brain in order to tap into a higher form of consciousness.

Second, when we consider Jesus' teachings, we find that Jesus is all about promoting an inner and outer lifestyle that runs completely counter to what the world tends to teach – taking the lowest places in society, not the highest.

Here are a few examples from just a single gospel: the Gospel of Matthew:

"Blessed are *the meek*, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matt 5:5)

“The greatest among you *will be your servant*. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matt 23:12)

“The last will be first, and the first will be last.” (Matt 20:16)

“Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” (Matt 16:25)

An Unexpected Messiah

Jesus put his life behind his teachings. Holy Week shows us nothing if not this very fact. When Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives on the back of a donkey on Palm Sunday, he fulfills a prediction by the prophet Zechariah, who said, “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, and riding on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zech 9:9)

In other words, Jesus is proposing that the Jewish people replace the present ruler of Israel – Emperor Caesar Augustus – with himself. If you think Jesus’ intention wasn’t clear to the Romans, consider how they respond during Holy Week!

When Jesus reaches Jerusalem and enters the Temple, toppling the tables of the money-changers inside, he is proposing that the Jewish people replace their present High Priest – Caiaphas – with himself. If you think his intention wasn’t abundantly clear to Caiaphas, consider how he responds during Holy Week!

One might think that by making a bid to become both King and High Priest, Jesus was *exalting* himself over others not lowering himself – especially since the only person thought to be capable of serving as both King and High Priest was God’s chosen Messiah. According to most Jews, the Messiah would be the most exalted human being on earth!

If Jesus was the kind of Messiah that people expected him to be, then one could rightly accuse him of hypocrisy – for seeking the highest place on the power totem pole, not the lowest.

Yet what kind of Messiah did Jesus consider himself to be?

The prophet Isaiah tells us exactly the kind of Messiah that Jesus embodied. He is a Messiah who Isaiah says will be “despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity ...” One who is “wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.” “Upon him,” says Isaiah, “was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Clearly, the prediction that Jesus fulfills is of a Messiah who chooses to serve others over being served; who seeks the lowest place at the table, not the highest; who believes not in the power of redemptive violence, but redemptive suffering; one who loves his enemies, prays for those who persecute him; and returns evil with good.

Of course, what appears to be self-abasement in the eyes of the world, is apparently self-realization and fulfillment in the eyes of Spirit. It is like getting low enough to tap into the Zero-Point Field, or in any case, the ultimate source of non-physical power.

Jesus' actions in this respect come to a head on Maundy Thursday, at the Passover Seder that was his Last Supper. Here, Jesus reveals that he intends to replace Israel's Passover Lamb with his own body and blood – thereby completely reversing what the Passover Lamb even stood for in Jewish tradition.

The original Passover Lamb's blood was shed so that God's Spirit would "pass over" the innocent Hebrew slaves and slaughter the children of the guilty Egyptians who failed to free God's people from slavery after an abundance of warnings. When Jesus becomes the Passover Lamb, that protective blood will be shed not by innocent Hebrew slaves seeking protection but by who? By the very people who were crucifying Jesus!

Whether Jesus was literally protecting his crucifiers from God's wrath through the shedding of his (Passover Lamb) blood is an open question. I think he was simply revealing the heart of God's heart. Namely, that God's love and grace are so vast that God would even forgive the torture and killing of God's own Messiah if it meant that those who experience such forgiveness would turn their hearts once again to God.

Can you hear what this message means for you? and me? It means that, if Jesus truly reveals the heart of God's own heart on the Cross, there is literally nothing we can do to separate ourselves from God's love and grace. There is no sin that is so great that, when we turn to God, God isn't providing the grace to cover that sin.

If Jesus' intention wasn't clear enough to those who crucified him – or to you and me – Jesus states it clearly when he prays from the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

How much lower can you go on the worldly power totem pole than to subject yourself to torture and crucifixion and then forgive your own torturers and crucifiers of the debts they surely owed the Universe?

Yet, if you think that, by descending the worldly power totem pole, Jesus was abasing or degrading himself, think again. For, what did Jesus receive in return for utterly humbling and emptying himself, letting go of every bit of worldly power a person can possess?

Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday. The Cross connected Jesus to the highest form of true power in the Universe. A power so great that not even death could keep it from rising again.

If you want to combat worldly power most effectively, and decisively, the message Good Friday and Easter Sunday indicates that it is not through overcoming others, but by coming under others. It is through loving your enemies, doing good to those who hurt you, and praying for those who persecute you. In so doing, you connect yourself to a source of higher

consciousness and power that the powers of the world fundamentally do not understand, and can never overcome – not in any way that matters in the end.

Arnion v. Therion

This message is ultimately the message of the Book of Revelation, as well. This book of the Bible is a pretty strange one, but it contains some absolute jewels of spiritual insight.

According to Revelation, who was the only one in the Universe who had the power to break the Seven Seals on the divine scroll – that is, fulfill God’s will for humanity? Not a lion, but a lamb. Not just any lamb, but a lamb that, in Greek, is *arnion* – that is, a lamb so young it can barely walk. A lambkin. And not just any lambkin, but a lambkin showing the marks of *slaughter*.

Surely, you can’t get any lower on the worldly power pyramid than Arnion, the *slain lambkin*. Yet the Book of Revelation claims that it will be Arnion who ultimately will defeat Therion. That is, “The Beast.” (Greek *therion* = beast)

What does this all mean to you and me in 2023, as we face political polarization, increasing authoritarianism and militarization in our world, and numerous other threats at home and abroad? And will any of this help us as we face challenges and conflicts in our everyday lives?

I think the most productive way to answer these questions is to leave you with a way of answering them yourself. Simply hold up the image in your mind of Arnion defeating Therion. The slain lambkin defeating The Beast. Then embrace this image in your heart – preferably in deep and prayerful meditation.

Your heart will provide you the answers.